

The Shelburne Hotel  
Michigan Avenue and the Boardwalk  
Atlantic City  
Atlantic County  
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-929

HABS  
NJ,  
1-ATC1,  
11-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE SHELBURNE HOTEL

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Location: Michigan Avenue and the Boardwalk  
Atlantic City, Atlantic County, New Jersey

Present Owner: National Inns, Ltd.

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Shelburne Hotel is one of the very few older hotels remaining in Atlantic City, a nationally significant resort. It is significant in its opulent Georgian Revival character, as well as in the role which it played in the 'pre-casino' life of Atlantic City.

Project Information: In November, 1979 approval was given to a joint project (National Inns Ltd. and the Benihana Corporation) to renovate the Shelburne Hotel and to build an adjoining casino-hotel to the north. This project was discontinued in 1981, after demolition had already begun and the interiors had been gutted. As the building was left in vacant and dangerous condition, it will be demolished by the City of Atlantic City. Mitigative documentation prepared by the Atlantic City Department of Planning and Development.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

The original Shelburne Hotel was a frame structure, described in the National Register nomination as "sprawling...with wide porches and sun parlors." This hotel was renowned for its cuisine, and it attracted such patrons as James Buchanan "Diamond Jim" Brady, who paid \$1000 /week for his apartment facing the ocean and who died in the Shelburne in 1917. In 1922, the section nearest the Boardwalk was replaced by a 9-story structure (the existing front section). The architect of this section is not known. The 12-story center section, designed by Warren and Wetmore of New York City, was built in 1926. During this period, Atlantic City was still primarily a health resort, catering to the demand for the regenerative effects of sun and salt water bathing. As salt water baths were considered healthy, the Shelburne's rooms had hot and cold running salt as well as fresh water. The interiors were opulent and eclectic, and the hotel continued to receive such notables as Lillian Russell and Irving Berlin.

The hotel was taken over by the military during World War II. After the war, the hotel was returned to civilian use and more of the old frame building was demolished, leaving only a small wing to the rear of the 1926 section. This wing was described in the 1977 National Register nomination as asphalt sided, with a mansard roof and "a dining room designed as a ship" to the south. It was demolished in 1979, along with the interiors and Boardwalk arcade of the main building.

In 1950, the Shelburne was purchased by National Inns, Ltd., and the building was renovated to cater to the rising sales convention trade. A ballroom was built in 1953 to provide more display space. The Shelburne was later a focal point of the 1964 Democratic National Convention. William White in his book The Making of the President-1964 reports "...the hawkers, the knockdown discount auctions, the hotels where room service did not function and where prices soared, the restaurants where one could not be seated and food was bad, the honky-tonk and the tawdriness combined to produce an immediate aphorism: 'This is the original Bay of Pigs'. One or two of the hotels- notably such hostleries as the Shelburne and Haddon Hall- rose to the occasion with grace and efficiency. But most accustomed to smaller conventions... broke down under the demands of a political convention." The Shelburne was still open and basically intact in 1977, two years before its demise.

DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION:

The Shelburne Hotel is constructed of brick and limestone over a steel frame, and is Georgian revival in style. the front (1922) section is five bays wide and nine bays deep, rising from a two-story base five floors to an elaborate cornice, with one additional story acting as a 'parapet'. The center bays of the Boardwalk front are articulated as a central pavilion, with flanking pairs of brick pilasters and a rounded pediment with a coat of arms in relief. The 1926 section rises from a similar two-story base eight floors (every other bay is a seven-story oriel) to an 'entablature' which comprises the eleventh floor. The cornice above this floor is surmounted by the penthouse, which is in turn surmounted by the tower/cupola. The penthouse is articulated

Descriptive Information (cont.)

on the front as a series of pedimented pavilions, with flanking medallions and round-arched window openings with coats-of-arms in relief. A parapet balustrade with urns runs around the top of these 'pavilions'. The tower/cupola is a tall narrow pavilion, with Corinthian columns framing its side openings. The cornice is surmounted by another coat of arms, and the whole terminates in an elaborate metal spire.

The limestone arcade which fronted the Boardwalk has been demolished, and the interiors have been gutted.

For more information, see the 1977 National Register nomination prepared by Jonathan Fricker.

1977 Description of interiors (now gutted):

"The hotel rooms are serviced by a central corridor on each floor which runs from front to rear of the building. All major rooms are on the ground floor. The main lobby, which occurs in the 1926 section, is entered from the north side of the building on Michigan Avenue. Its elaborate plaster ceiling is cut into great rectangular panels framed with denticular cornices and inscribed with foliated molded oval motifs. The room has a heavily carved entablature with foliage motifs, and deeply incised raised oak paneling. Especially notable are the English baroque style chandeliers. East of the lobby (toward the beach) is the elevator corridor, a wide room with a Jacobean strapwork ceiling, and a fine oak check-in desk with a carved pedimented top. Further east is the dark oak paneled drawing room which has a beam ceiling with canvas panels formed in Jacobean strapwork motifs. Access to the Boardwalk is provided by a wide corridor with a heavy ceiling, articulated in the manner of the California missions.

Just north of the lobby is a small dining room with red silk paper and a heavy cornice formed of pairs of gold leaf dolphins with tails crossed.

To the rear of the lobby through a paneled corridor is the main hall which was decorated in 1954 with marbleized mirrored walls, cut into panels with large inset sunburst motifs covered in gold leaf.

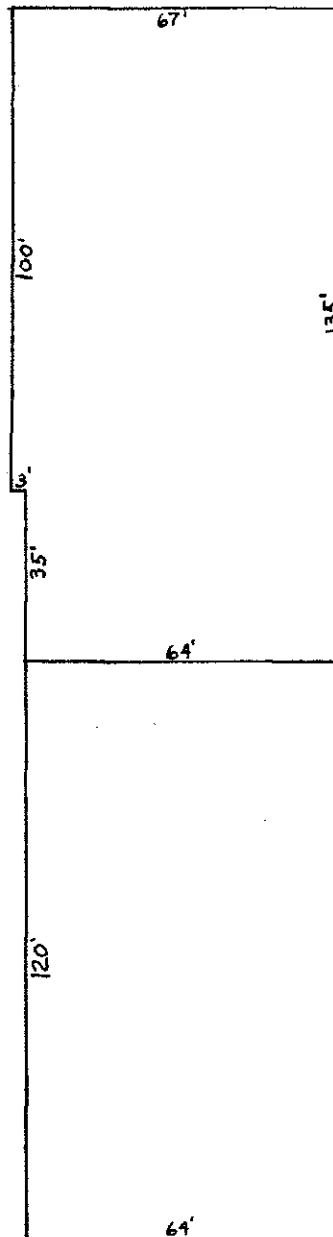
Of particular note is the... 12th floor penthouse with its great frontal drawing room which has a marble Adams type fireplace and coffered ceiling. The dining room has a Georgian fireplace and raised oak paneling. The bathrooms retain their period fixtures, and all have art deco striped opaque glass wall covering."

-National Register Nomination, 1977,  
prepared by Jonathan Fricker

SHELburne HOTEL  
NORTH—WEST MICHIGAN AVE. AND THE BOARDWALK  
ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY

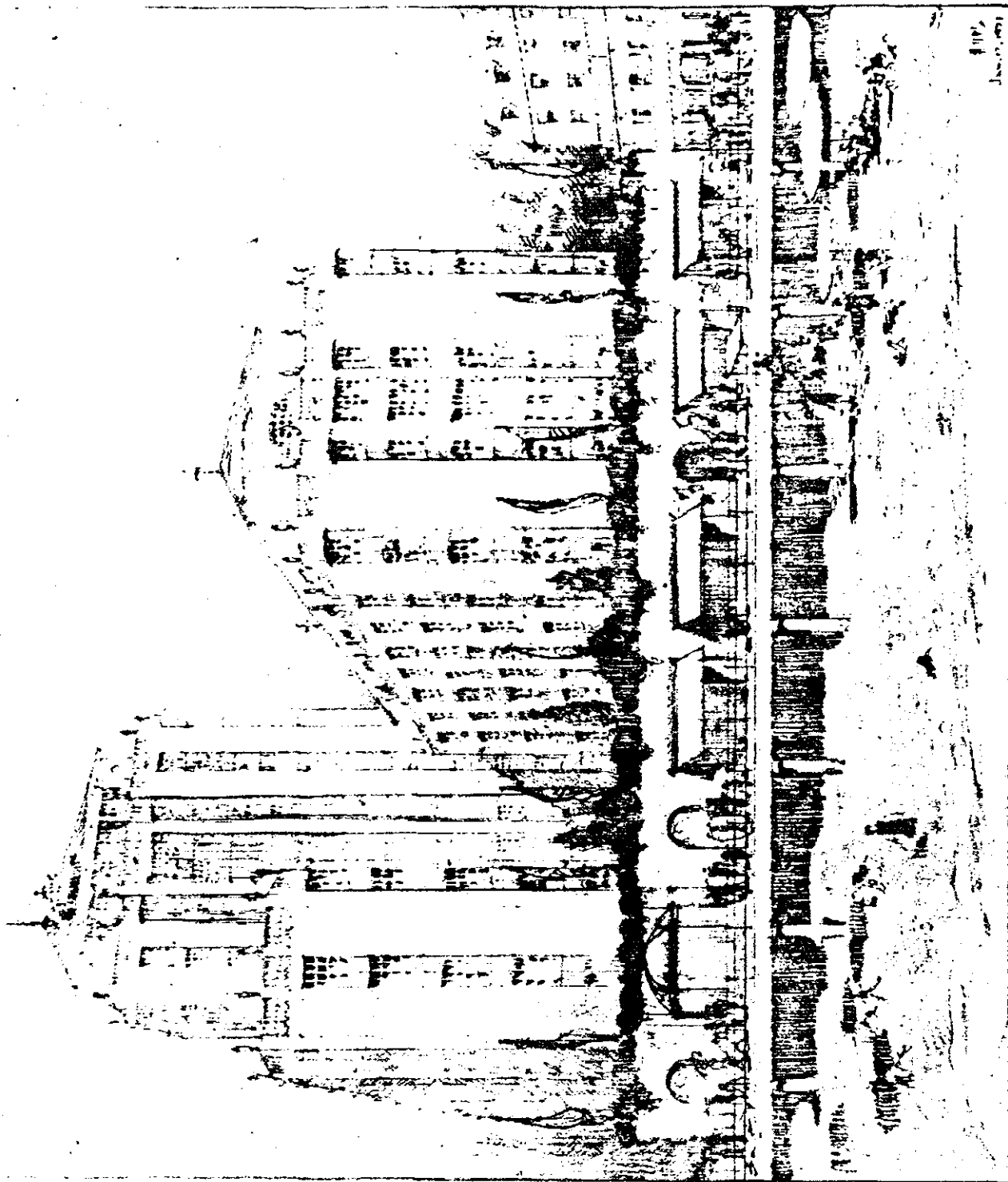


SCALE 1"=40'



MICHIGAN AVE.

BOARDWALK



Project (?) for the Shelburne Hotel, dated January 17, 1921. From Avery Library, Columbia University, NYC.